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ABSTRACT

The student population of urban schools reflects widely diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, yet few teacher training programs are currently addressing the need to recruit and train teachers reflecting this diversity. The Seattle Public Schools/Western Washington University (SPS/WWU) post-baccalaureate paraprofessional teacher preparation program for K-8 certification was designed to increase the number of teachers of color and bilingual teachers in the Seattle public schools. Prior research revealed that the Seattle School District's Instructional Assistants were highly qualified. Many were students of color with bachelors degrees who had hoped to become teachers but did not pursue teaching credentials because of financial constraints, workloads, or lack of confidence to return to school. The SPS/WWU program consisted of 4 quarters of coursework, with the third quarter dedicated to student teaching. Instructors came from the public schools, the university, and the district administration. Twenty-nine paraprofessionals were selected for the 1-year program; 1 dropped out, 18 graduated on time, and the remaining students finished with some additional study. Based on the SPS/WWU experience, the conclusion is that elements for a successful program to train teachers from widely diverse backgrounds include: (1) clear requirements and responsibilities; (2) fair and equitable treatment of students; (3) giving particular attention to first generation college students, especially those who have been out of school for several years; (4) faculty who are willing and able to work with urban students; (5) provisions for mentoring students; (6) financial support; and (7) flexibility of class scheduling. (ND)

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June A. Gordon
Presentation to faculty of University of Washington 6/95

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PREPARATION FOR URBAN TEACHING:

POST-B.A. PARAPROFESSIONALS

My topic is one found amidst the rhetoric of many schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE)s across the country but about which little is being done: How to increase the number of teachers who are willing and able to work with students from diverse backgrounds in urban schools. While the national demands are great for a teaching corps that meets the needs of today's students, few colleges or universities are seriously addressing the challenge. Part of the solution lies in diversifying the teaching corps. Of the nearly 41 million public school students, 33 percent are students of color, as compared with 14 percent of the nation's 2.6 million public school teachers. As our experience demonstrates, higher education has been slow and sparse in its response to this issue even when faced with a viable approach.

The fact that so few programs have been developed to adequately prepare teachers for diversity, and that fewer have succeeded, might be an indication that such actions are perceived as an insurgency within the community that threatens established ways of teacher education. The question arises whether universities are, in reality, interested in preparing teachers so that they can, in fact, teach all children effectively and equitably.

I am not advocating race-based role modeling or matching students of color with teachers of color, rather I am acknowledging the fact that the complex problems that our society faces cannot be solved without the collaboration of people who come from all walks of life, and who can offer new insights into old and persistent problems. We need teachers from a variety of backgrounds providing a variety of perspectives which address the values and concerns of all our people. Teachers need to reflect the diversity of the student population. I am not using diversity here as a code word for color. I am speaking of diversity in its widest sense: diversity in terms of socioeconomic class, culture, language, religion, and ethnicity, understanding that many of these categories combine and overlap. Students need teachers as advocates. Diversity in the teaching force provides children with greater options and possibilities for being understood.

The post-baccalaureate paraprofessional teacher preparation program for K-8 certification that I have been involved in directing over the past four years takes these issues into account. This collaboration between WWU and the Seattle Public Schools represented a challenge to both partners to move beyond the rhetoric of 'a crisis in urban education' by responding to the reality that there are indeed educated people of color "in the pipeline" and that they want to become teachers. In this presentation I will delineate some preconditions for success and elaborate on how the program was conceptualized, developed, implemented, and funded. I will also discuss how the University of Washington could participate in such a program as well as transform its current teacher education program to insure that all students are guaranteed a chance at an equitable and quality education.

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THE CONCERN

There are a variety of reasons why students of color are not in the teaching profession. These are not the same reasons, however, that are given by colleges of education. Universities state their reasons as: "There are not enough qualified minorities 'out there'"; "A minority with a degree can get any job he or she wants;" "Teaching doesn't pay enough;" or "Teaching isn't of interest to minorities." Research performed through surveys of paraprofessionals before this program began etched a radically different picture. Not only were there students of color with bachelor degrees who had low paying jobs, but these jobs were in the field of teaching. The reason they chose to become an instructional aide was because they wanted to give back to their community and ultimately hoped to become teachers. One cannot help but wonder that if this is true of an isolated group of paraprofessionals, how many more students of color with college degrees are out there working in minimum wage jobs who would love to become teachers? Perhaps the problem lies not with students' of color interest in teaching but with colleges of education which limit access and impede success for "non-traditional" college students.

To assume that people of color are not interested in the education of their children is to perpetuate the mythology which blames the individual rather than the institution and the larger society for the economic and educational impediments that have prevented the manifestation of many a dream. We know that children graduate from inner city schools without an education which will liberate them from the constraints of poverty. Many fail to be challenged in ways that make education relevant to their lives. Some are passed on due to teachers' fear of confrontation. Other students who challenge the system are pushed out or drop out. Some leave to work or wander.

Yet of those who do survive and thrive in the system, it is said that "they could be doctors or lawyers, so why would they want to become teachers." This too is a mythology with allows for escapism on the part of the majority. We know this is not true given the structural barriers to these profession and yet we hear this excuse frequently. If this were true we would not have been able to find students of color with bachelor degrees working as Instructional Aides.

THE CONTEXT

Seattle is a district in which all five of the universities in the area produce but a handful of future teachers of color each year. This is in a school district where 58 percent of the 44,000 students are students of color. It usually comes as a surprise to many that Seattle, while in the Northwest of America, is a city which has always been multicultural. For over one hundred years there has been a significant Asian population in Seattle. In addition to migrant workers who come yearly to pick the apple and other crops, there are Latinos and Filipinos who have been here for generations. There are also African Americans who came West with the gold rush and as cowboys and later arrived for wartime factory work or military service and decided to settle in Seattle to raise their families.

As diverse as the population is in Seattle, only twenty two percent of the teachers in the Seattle Public School District (SPS) are of minority group status and many are due for retirement. Most of the African American teachers have been with the district for over twenty years. They came not from the local community nor from the universities that surround the area but from the Southern U.S. In the 1970's a major recruitment effort was exerted to bring Black teachers from the South to Seattle to teach. Many of these individuals

have moved out of the classroom into administration. They are concerned that little effort has been exerted to bring in "their replacements." The days of going outside one's state to bring in teachers of color are over. It is imperative that we "home grow" our own. Colleges in the South and elsewhere are no longer allowing predominantly white states to take their teachers of color away. We were not alone in our assessment of the situation. Other school districts in the Northwest are having the same difficulty. At the beginning of the planning process several neighboring districts came together to discuss how to proceed. This collaboration proved politically useful in presenting our case to the superintendent and board.

THE HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1991 a statewide initiative went out from the Educational Service District (ESD) advocating a staff development program for classroom aides. This program proposed courses focused on skills and tasks which did not lead to a professional degree nor advancement. While this is the traditional way of upgrading paraprofessionals, we realized that our instructional assistants (I.A.) were not of the traditional variety. A survey documented that, in contrast to other districts in the state, Seattle's I.A.s were highly qualified. To even become an I.A. in the Seattle schools one must have an Associate's of Arts degree (A.A.) or 90 credits of college work; this is not necessarily true of other school districts. Many of Seattle's I.A.s not only had B.A.s but a few held Master's degrees. Some had been in the classroom as paraprofessionals for up to fifteen years. In many ways, some were more knowledgeable about teaching than the teachers they assisted who were graduates of colleges of education. So why hadn't these paraprofessionals gone on to acquire their teaching credential and, in doing so, increase their status and income?

In our survey 30% of the respondents indicated that they could not return to school for their certification because of financial constraints. 21% stated that their current work load made such a choice prohibitive. These two factors taken together speak to the need for flexibility and funding if non-traditional students are to be included in the teaching force. Working-class adults do not have the luxury of giving up their jobs to return to school. This reality is compounded when we include family responsibilities.

Other reasons for not pursuing certification study had to do with their lack of confidence in their ability to return to school after several years away. The labyrinth of the traditional certification program on top of the requisite courses and g.p.a. to enter a college of education mystified them. Nevertheless, in a discussion with union representatives for the I.A.s, we discovered that Seattle paraprofessionals wanted professional advancement. They did not want more inservice training that led nowhere; they wanted a program that would build towards certification. If they could find a program that could accommodate their unique situations, they would return to school. Having discovered the quality of the I.A.s and their needs, the Seattle Public School District asked local colleges and universities if they would collaborate in providing a rigorous, clinical teacher certification program for urban students who already had their B.A.s. Out of the five local urban universities, only one, Seattle University, promised to do so; all the rest declined the invitation, including the University of Washington. In the end, Seattle University reneged on its promise. Without a university collaboration, the program could not go through. The superintendent then suggested that we try Western Washington University (WWU), his Alma Mater. While WWU is located 100 miles North of Seattle in Bellingham, it does have a small urban campus in Seattle. After lengthy deliberation and negotiation, in January 1993 the four-

quarter intensive program was approved. With the support of the district and the union, the SPS/WWU teacher certification program became part of the district contract and strategic plan.

Our collaboration with WWU has not always been easy. There are many things that we could and should have done differently. WWU made the common mistake of most traditional colleges of education in providing little, if any, understanding of the students involved, their complex lives and the difficulty some would have academically.

THE PROGRAM

The SPS/WWU post-baccalaureate paraprofessional teacher preparation program for K-8 certification under discussion here was designed to increase the number of teachers of color and bilingual teachers in the Seattle public schools. This was, however, a program of great diversity, not limited to American minorities. The first cohort was truly multicultural with students from Vietnam, Cambodia, Peru, China, Philippines, and Eritrea (Ethiopia), as well as African Americans and European Americans. Two thirds were students of color and one third did not have English as their first language. Two students identified themselves as homosexual (a male and female). One woman was hearing impaired. Religious diversity was great and, for some students, far more significant than the issue of race. The average age of this non-traditional cohort was 38 years; more than half were male.

Recruitment began with a survey to all paraprofessionals. Students who had their B.A.s and were interested in becoming teachers went through an intensive screening process. Students were scrutinized for their commitment to working with inner city youth. Each was given the Gallop Teacher Perceiver Interview which measures the likelihood that an individual will be a good urban educator. In addition to three letters of recommendation, one which had to come from their immediate supervisor, students wrote a letter of intent and were interviewed by a group of educators who work with urban youth. This was not an easy process, particularly for the international students and for those who had been out of school for a decade or two. There were over 100 students in the first pool from which the 29 were selected.

Coursework was condensed into one year (four quarters) with the third quarter dedicated to student teaching in a school other than the one in which they held their instructional aide position. During the academic year, they took three to four courses each quarter in the evening while working in their paraprofessional jobs during the day. This was in addition to family obligations, which for some were very heavy. They were highly encouraged not to take on "side-jobs," nevertheless a few did out of economic necessity. For their last quarter they resumed full-time study with courses focusing on reflection, critique, and review.

The program ran as follows:

Fall	Math 281	4	Math for K-12 Teachers
	Psyc 351	4	Human learning, cognition
	Edaf 416	2	Persistent problems in ed. I
	Edci 394a	1	Elementary practicum
Win	Edci 497a	5	Methods, integrated curr. I.
	Edci 497b	5	Methods, integrated curr. II.
	Edci 394a	1	Practicum

Spr	Edci 429	3	Classroom management
	Edci 494	12	Internship
Sum	Ec 363	4	Exceptional Children
	Psyc 352	4	Child development
	Edaf 416b	3	Persistent Problems II
	Edci 497c	4	Methods, integrated curr. III.

The program cost over $250,000 for the first cohort of which $125,000 went to WWU. Part of the remaining money paid for the substitute time. In exchange, students were expected to teach in the Seattle School District for four years upon completion of the program. If this contract were broken, the student would be required to pay back his or her portion of the costs.

Instructors came from the public schools, the university, and the district (people who had been teachers but are now administrators). The goal of the program was to have a diverse group of teachers teaching a diverse group of students.

Student placement was to be in urban classrooms in the home districts of the students. Eighteen out of the original 29 students in the first cohort graduated on time, this past August, 1994. Out of those who did not graduate during the prescribed period, only one left the program, a Mexican Indian male of 54 years of age. Another male of African American descent had to fulfill his commitment to the military. Six students did not graduate on time due to failing an Algebra test; three others had difficulty with their student teaching. These last eight are scheduled to graduate this coming year if they pass through these requirements.

REFLECTIONS

In order for a program like this to work there needs to be a committed core of people. In the SPS/WWU scenario there were only a few; there needed to be more. The emotional and personal drain on a few individuals caring for the concerns of struggling paraprofessionals as they attempt their reentry into higher education is awesome. University faculty members must see how they contribute to the difficulty when they disconnect from the real lives of their students and the communities that they come from. Faculty are needed who can deal with the energy, concern and upset which is rooted in urban communities. We are looking for people who truly care about the success of every student. This program demonstrates what can be done to address the need for more teachers of color and bilingual teachers in urban classrooms. Perhaps the question we are left with is how do you institutionalize social consciousness and awareness in people who perceive themselves untouched by urban schools?

HOW THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CAN HELP

The University of Washington is the only public four-year institution of higher education located in an urban area in the entire state. Nevertheless, it often presents itself as disconnected to the diverse community which surrounds it. I am told that it is a "research institution," as if such a status obscures the relationship with, if not the responsibility for, the urban population and the future of those that live within the city limits. Many students of color cannot attend the other five four-year universities/colleges in the state due to family and

work responsibilities. Some choose not to continue their education rather than leave the urban environment that provides them with a sense of community.

Current teacher education programs must be sensitive to the needs of students of color, especially those who may not fit the mold of a traditional, and compliant, student. If diversity is truly desired, then tokenism will not suffice. Universities need to admit and support individuals who may think differently from the traditional, middle-class student. This may bring conflict into the classroom, and it will bring change. But without change, students of color will continue to leave predominantly white institutions; they will continue to refuse to enter teaching because it is perceived as a perpetuation of oppression and damaging mythologies. Without teachers who are willing to work for the education of all children, many children will not become educated and, if they are not, who will bear the burden of their ignorance?

It is imperative that the University of Washington come to see how its current methods of recruitment, admissions, and support not only screen out, but impede the success of many first generation college students of color.

As noted before, we must get beyond the rhetoric that "there just aren't any out there." There are many students of color who have an interest in teaching but do not know how to take that next step towards certification. There are many who would attend or return to college if the invitation was made and avenues opened to handle the logistics of financing and family.

The trend towards a fifth year program does not work well for first generation college students. Individuals from working class families have a difficult enough time justifying postponement of income for four years, but then to extend that to five is enough to drive them from the teaching profession into a job that, while in the long run might be less stable, and less economically viable, in the short run pays the bills. Even if students are given tuition waivers, the cost of books, clothes and survival on a college campus can be great. Many are the stories of working class people who dropped out of college due to the embarrassment of not having that extra change to go out for coffee or dinner with their peers. While this might seem trivial to middle class people, it is traumatic to those without economic support systems.

What is needed is a program which recruits students from all walks of life based on criteria that go beyond g.p.a. and test scores, especially since these have no connection to the quality of classroom performance. Rather, students are needed who are committed to teaching students from diverse backgrounds, who have worked with low income people in some capacity, and who have experience with people who speak different languages and practice different religions. To find such individuals we need to go into the various communities and inquire at the agencies, the clubs, the churches, and the organizations that support youth. These students need to be carefully mentored and supported through their academic coursework. They also need to stay in touch with their communities by working in the schools in a variety of paid capacities. There are a variety of scenarios that could be drawn from this: collaboration with community colleges, high schools, and businesses, and recruitment of the un- and under-employed and those in social service agencies who would like a career change. The possibilities are limitless. But to do any of it requires a committed core of faculty and staff who see the imperative of transforming the teaching force.

I am not asking that the University of Washington take over the program that Western Washington University has been involved in for three years. We need lots of avenues. We

also need permanent change in the way we recruit and train teachers, not a plethora of mini programs unconnected to true institutional change.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS BASED ON OUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE WWU/SPS PROGRAM

Make requirements and responsibilities clear

Non-traditional students who are survivors can quickly sense pretension and injustice. It is imperative that the people involved in the program be straight with the students. If your goal is to screen out half of the students in the first quarter, tell them that. If certain courses are being used as gatekeepers, this should be made clear. Students must know what is required and why. It helps to give the larger picture by demonstrating how courses support one another and why they are necessary. To say that the taking of a specific course is a sign of an educated person is not enough.

In the WWU/SPS collaboration, algebra was the unspoken gatekeeping course. I won't go into all the problems that were caused over the confusion around the role of this course in the program, but suffice it to say that the way it was handled caused major ideological and professional schisms to arise. The difficulties could have been averted through clearer communication and an understanding of where the students were coming from. Some of these students had been out of school for 15 years. Just because they had B.A.s did not mean that they had taken algebra or if they did, that they understood it.

Fair and equitable treatment of students.

Do not mess with the minds of these people. They are already suspicious of a system that is destroying many of their people. Do not raise artificial barriers; they have enough to contend with.

Greater academic remediation for first generation college students, especially if they have been out of school for several years.

Give help before they fail. If the goal is to prepare these students for urban schools, then do so. That means filling in the gaps that they may have either academically or interpersonally. We found that it would have been helpful to have had writing and speaking tutorials the quarter before the official program began. A few students who had been educated in schools where they were not challenged had difficulty with their writing. International students could have benefited from intensive work on public speaking. A few other students had slight speech or hearing impediments that could have been remedied if the right person were given the time to provide feedback and correction. I have found that many non-minority women need work in group process; often they are afraid to deal with confrontation and conflict, characteristics which are inherent in public schooling.

Hire capable and aware faculty who are willing to work with urban students.

If 4 yr. faculty do not want to teach these students or are not able to do this work, hire community people, K-12 teachers, or send students to classes at the community college. More damage can be done and more time wasted by placing the wrong instructor in a class with people who have both street smarts and who have already had negative experiences in school. Faculty also need to communicate well among themselves so that there is a

cohesiveness to the program and time to share information about students.

Advisement and mentoring.

A competent staff is necessary to assist the students in learning how to navigate the system. Faculty should be doing this as well, but students need advocates in the administration. It takes more than one person fulfilling her/his dream. It requires a group of people who are working together on a common mission. We need people who care and honor the larger scope of these people's lives.

Financial support.

As mentioned before, many non-traditional students have family and job responsibilities outside of the classroom.
In order for them to be able to focus on learning, outside distractions need to be minimalized. Jobs need to be related to schooling where they can receive experience and income.

Flexibility of class scheduling.

CONCLUSION

What I have said here today, while focusing on students of color, should be applied to all students. Respect, honesty, understanding the larger context of the individual's life, and a desire for each person to succeed should be the basis of any education. It has been said before that what is good education for students of color is good for everyone. Perhaps it is time to realize that we will all gain from accepting the diversity that exists within and between all communities.